

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: September 20, 2011

Agenda Item: Draft of the Fort Peck Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan

Division: Fish and Wildlife (Fisheries)

Action Needed: _

X Approval of Proposed Rule/Action _____ Approval of Final Rule/Action
_____ Endorse Course of Action _____ None - information only

Time for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

FWP Fisheries Bureau has completed a Tentative Draft of the Fort Peck Reservoir Fisheries Management Plan. This plan is the result of a nine month public involvement process including public scoping, eight open houses throughout eastern and central Montana and a 60-day public comment period on the Draft Management Plan. Additionally, the Plan has been available for public review on the FWP webpage, by request from fisheries management staff and at all public meetings.

The goal of the Fort Peck Fisheries management Plan is: *Manage the diverse, self-sustaining and propagated multi-species Fort Peck Reservoir fishery with the main emphasis on producing a high quality recreational walleye fishery primarily through hatchery production.*

This Tentative Draft incorporates comments received on the Draft Plan. The changes made to the Draft plan attempt to strike a balance between the public's desires for a high quality multi-species fishery and the biological sustainability of the fishery. No fishing regulation changes have been made to the Fort Peck Reservoir fishery.

The following components of the Plan have been highlighted by the public as areas that need to be updated; 1) angler walleye catch rates; 2) walleye stocking rates; 3) reservoir water level management; 4) tournaments

Substantive changes made to the Draft Plan include;

- 1) Walleye catch rates were established at 0.5 fish per hour in the previous plan. The Draft proposed a more sustainable rate of 0.3 per hour. Public comment overwhelmingly supported a higher catch rate. Although high walleye catch rates are more indicative of a lack of adequate forage rather than a healthy walleye population, the tentative Plan proposed 0.4 fish per hour.
- 2) Walleye Stocking: The Draft Plan stated a goal of stocking a minimum of 2.0 million and a maximum of 4.0 million fingerlings annually. The tentative Plan raises the lower threshold and removes the upper bounds (**Stock a minimum of 3.0 million fingerlings annually**). Fingerling production will depend on quality of eggs collected, egg hatching success and pond production (spring weather conditions). If fingerling production exceeds 3 million, biological and environmental conditions (reservoir water level, predator/prey densities, and walleye condition factors) will be reviewed to determine if stocking more walleyes is justified. Stocking rates may be reduced if biological and environmental conditions are unfavorable to maintaining a high quality walleye fishery)
- 3) Reservoir Water level Management; Consistent with the previous Plan, MFWP will make

biologically based water level recommendations to the Army Corps of Engineers for inclusion in the Annual Operating Plan. These recommendations, if implemented will provide stable to increasing water levels during critical spawning periods and long-term recommendations that allow terrestrial vegetation to establish followed by incremental flooding.

- 4) Tournaments; the following changes have been made to the draft Plan;

A maximum of 16 tournaments will be permitted per calendar year.

- a. **No more than 12 open water and 4 ice tournament will be permitted per calendar year.**
- b. **No more than 6 tournaments will be permitted from June 1st through July 30th.**
- c. **No tournaments will be permitted for the weekends of Memorial Day, Father's Day, Fourth of July, or Labor Day.**
- d. **Only one tournament per weekend will be permitted.**
- e. **Established Fort Peck tournaments of 10 consecutive years or more will be given preference.**
- f. **Years where more applications are received than available tournament dates will be entered in a lottery.**
- g. **Applicants will be required to list first, second and third choice tournament dates on applications.**
- h. **Unsuccessful applicants will receive one bonus point. Tournament applications will be entered into the lottery in subsequent years and bonus points will be applied (e.g. If an applicant has accumulated one bonus point, that application will be entered into the lottery two times).**